



2019 Annual Report



GRAND TRAVERSE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
2650 LAFRANIER RD, TRAVERSE CITY, MICHIGAN 49686

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This 2019 annual report is a compilation of data from various sources to show the direct impact that Veterans and their families have on Grand Traverse County. Our office assists them in applying for compensation, pension, healthcare, education and a wide variety of other benefits for which they are entitled. This, in turn, affords them the opportunity to maintain a livelihood and take advantage of the many things Grand Traverse County has to offer.

Veterans and their families are a cornerstone in this county and provide an invaluable economic impact. With the assistance of the various veterans organizations here in Grand Traverse County and other outreach programs, we ensure Veterans are made aware and maximize all the benefits and resources available to them. We work diligently to enrich the lives of every Veteran and their dependents that call Northern Michigan home.

The staff here at Grand Traverse County Department of Veterans Affairs is proud of the many accomplishments over the last year and the growth that we continue to experience. We strive to provide the best services to the Veterans and their dependents of Grand Traverse County because of the many sacrifices they have made while serving our country.

MISSION STATEMENT

The Grand Traverse County Veterans Affairs Office strives to provide professional assistance to veterans and their families with understanding and accessing available benefits through Federal, State of Michigan and local government agencies.

BACKGROUND

The Grand Traverse County Department of Veterans Affairs (GTCVA) was created November 27, 1991 by Grand Traverse County Commissioners resolution 277-91 of adoption of Michigan Act 192 of 1953 "An act to create a county department of veterans' affairs in certain counties, and to prescribe its powers and duties; to create the county veteran service fund and to provide for contributors to and expenditures from that fund; and to transfer the powers and duties of the soldier's relief commission in those counties."

The Grand Traverse County VA Committee is comprised of 7 veterans appointed by the Grand Traverse County Commissioners for 2-4 year terms. The office is comprised of a Director, an Office Specialist and 3 Benefit Counselors (Veteran Service Officers).

The Grand Traverse County Board of Commissioners established a levy of .1185 mills in 2016. This millage provided \$ 549,700 (FY 2017), \$ 564,770 (FY 2018), \$ 587,900.90 (FY 2019).

Our office has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) with Leelanau county to provide services for veteran in their counties. During this MOU, GTCVA provides staff for their Administrator's office one day a week (Tuesday) in their county to visit and assist their veterans. The annual cost of the contract is \$46,618.

While the FY 2019 Operating Budget was \$669,000.00, but actual 2019 Expenses were only \$462,113.22.

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS



FY 2019 began with the ending of the MOU with Benzie County. The partnership started in 2013 to provide a veteran service officer from GTCVA. However, Benzie County requested a larger amount of service time than our office could provide.

Our staff participated in or presented in various Veterans Day ceremonies with the Senior Care Network. Staff also represented our office with various community organizations, which include: Grand Traverse Veterans Coalition, Reining Liberty Ranch, Parkinson's Network North, Michigan Works!, Senior Care Network, Grand Traverse County Parks & Recreation, U.S. Coast Guard, Bay Area Senior Advocates (BASA), NMC BBQ, Vets Center, Northern Michigan Fair, National Cherry Fest, North Michigan Community Action Agency and Covell Funeral Homes.

Throughout FY 2019, the Director and all staff attended various veteran benefits training conferences, including: Michigan Association of County Veteran Counselors Training conferences, National Association of County Veteran Service Officers training conference, US Department of Veteran Affairs (USDVA), Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA), Training, Responsibility, Involvement & Preparation (TRIP) training. These training opportunities ensure that our benefits counselors are properly trained, up-to-date on veterans benefit laws and prepared to provide quality service to veterans and families.

In addition to representing Grand Traverse County, I hold the position of National Service Director with the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO). This keeps the office connected to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in Washington, D.C.

In the middle of 2019, I worked with the County Administrator and Finance Director to lower the millage for our office. This not only was a savings to taxpayers, but helped align our income closer to our expenses. Throughout this report, you will notice statistics and information regarding our workload and the amount of funds which are expended on veterans' benefits in Grand Traverse County.

Please keep in mind that our office is not dealing with numbers and statistics, but the lives of those who served our country.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael W. Roof". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "M" and a cursive "R".

Michael W. Roof
Director

GTC COUNTY VETERANS' AFFAIRS STATISTICS

The data below is the scope of work from FY 2019.

OFFICE STATISTICS— FY 2019

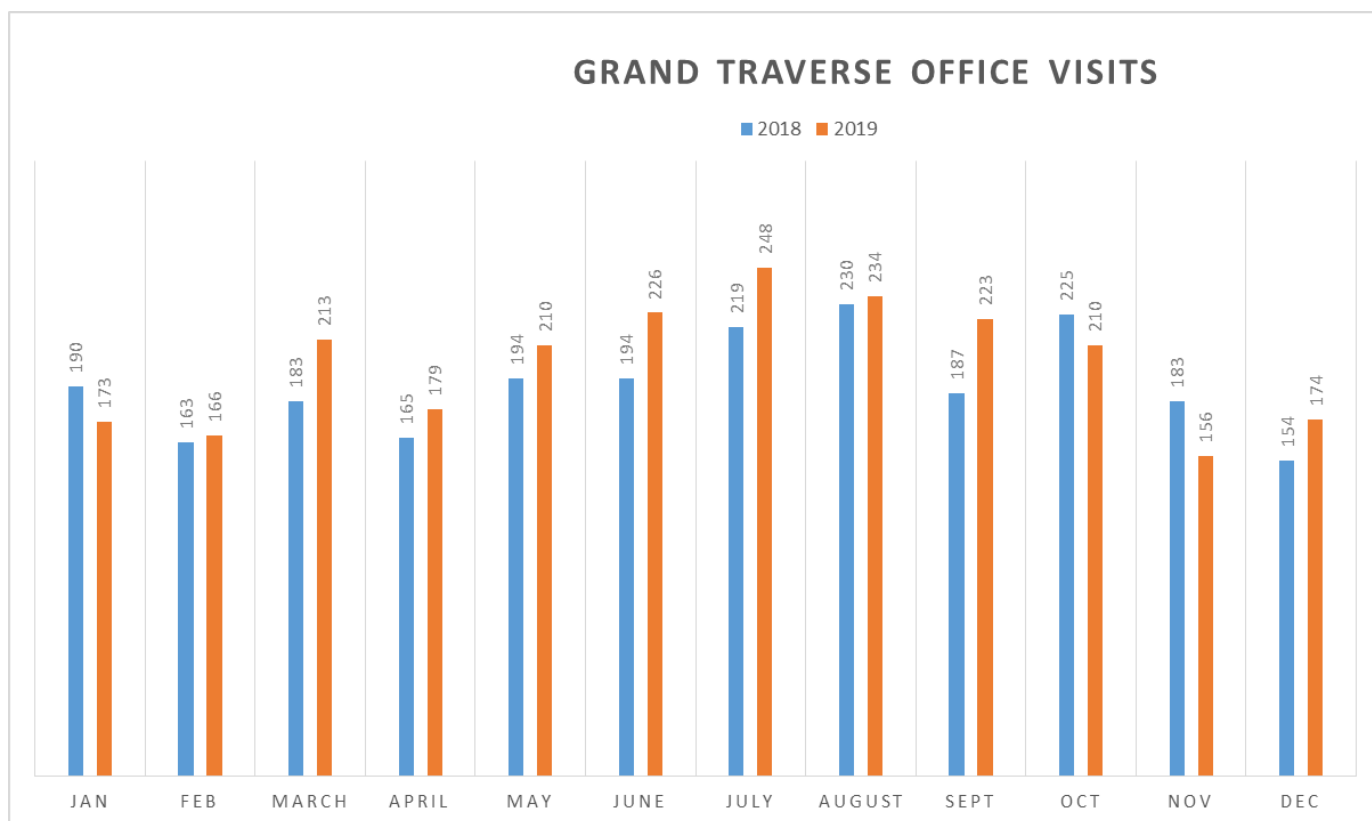
Office Visits

Grand Traverse **2,412 (5.5% increase from 2018)**

Phone Calls

Incoming 8,144

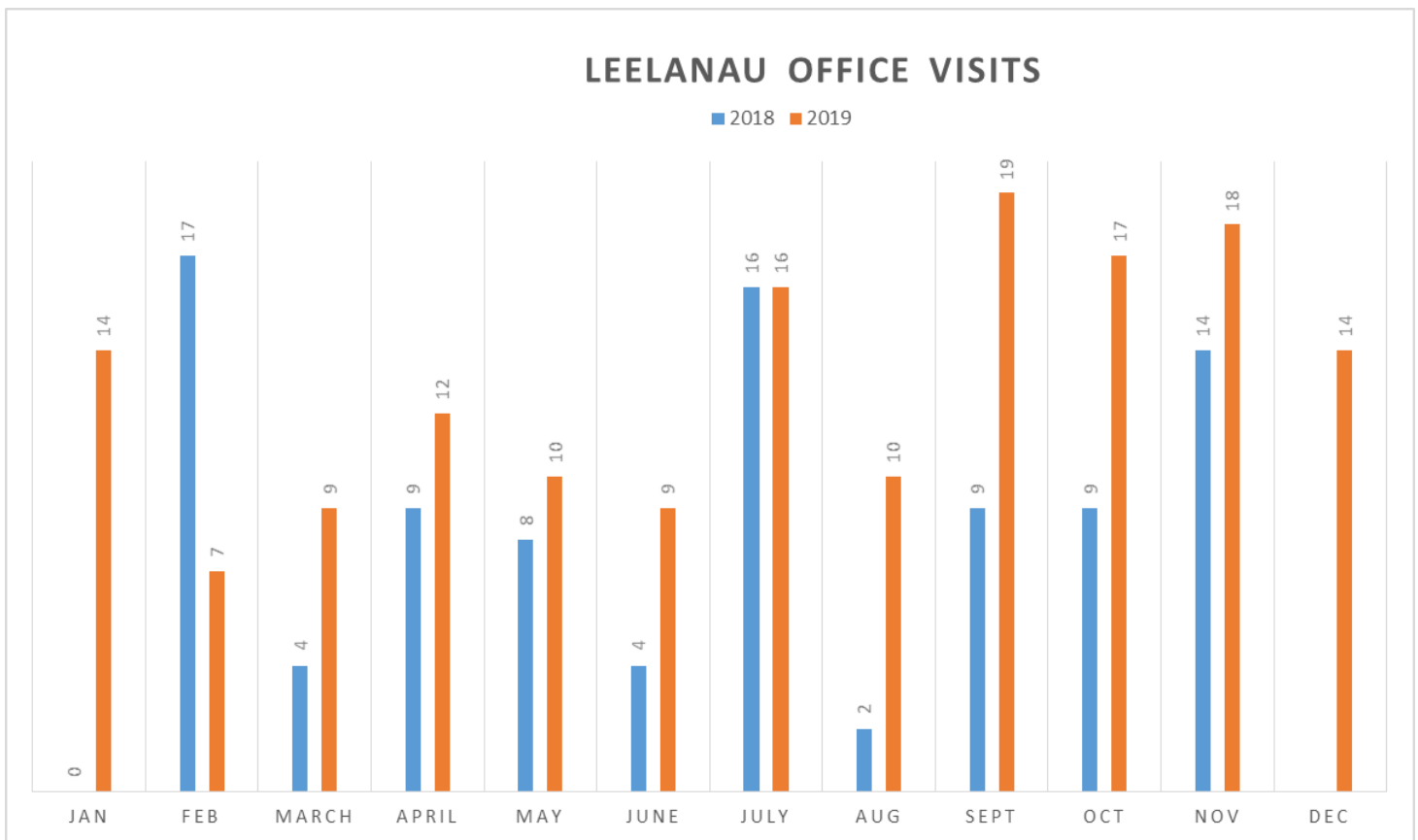
Outgoing 3,843



Numbers don't lie! In 2019, the number of monthly clients coming into our office saw a 5.5% increase from FY 2018. This can be attributed to the number of outreach opportunities. Through public radio, newspaper, social media and GATHER Veterans magazine, we have been able to grow.

Office Visits

Leelanau 155 (68% increase from 2018)



The Leelanau office is staffed only one day a week through set appointments and walk-ins. As you can see from the graph, there was significant growth in office contacts.

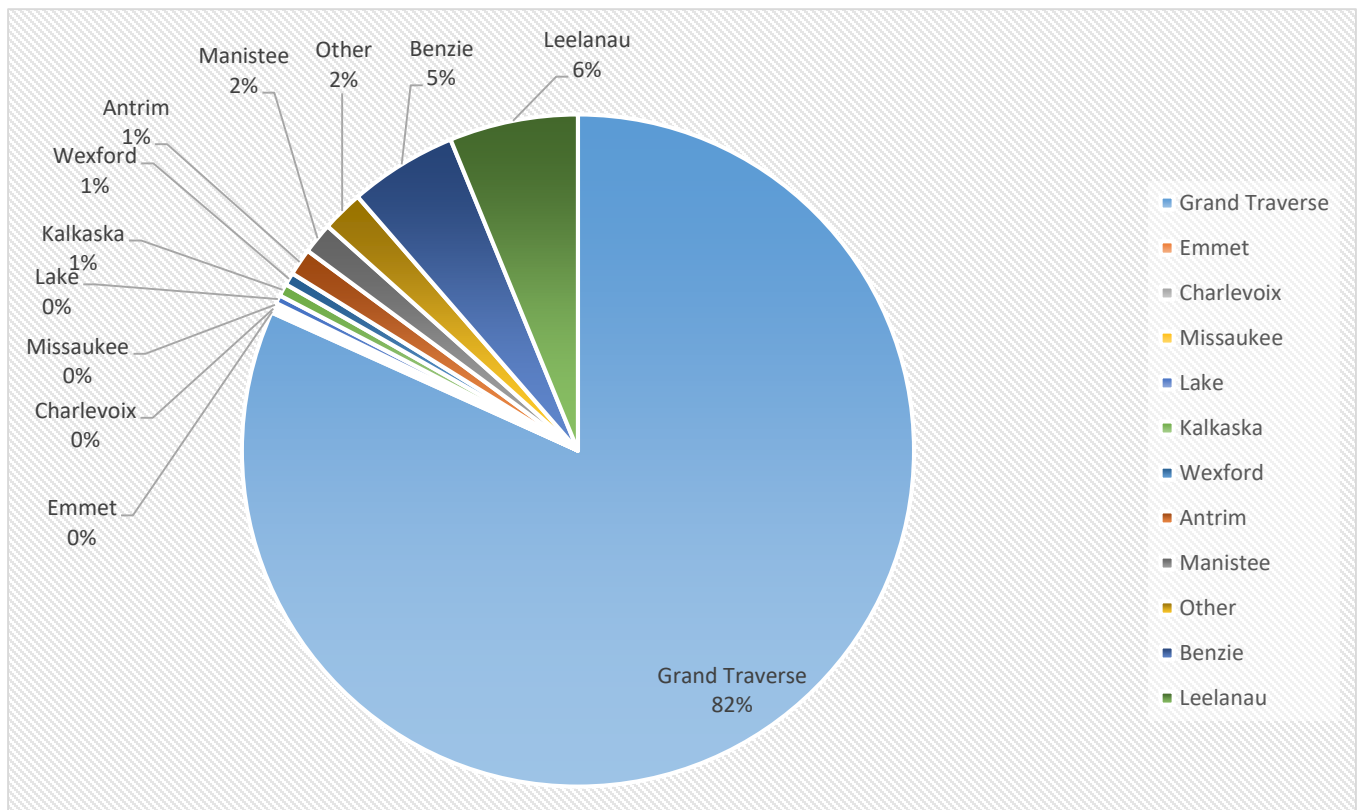
Our Leelanau VSO, Chris Dailey has been instrumental in helping to increase these numbers.

In FY 18, there were only 92 office visits.

OFFICE VISIT DEMOGRAPHICS

The Grand Traverse Veterans Affairs Committee believes that our office should assist any veteran or dependant that visits our office.

Due to our funding, our office is restricted to only assist Grand Traverse County Veterans and dependants with finanical assistance or Michigan Veterns Trust Fund.



As stated above there is no restrictions on who we can assist with VA Benefits per our VA Committee guidelines.

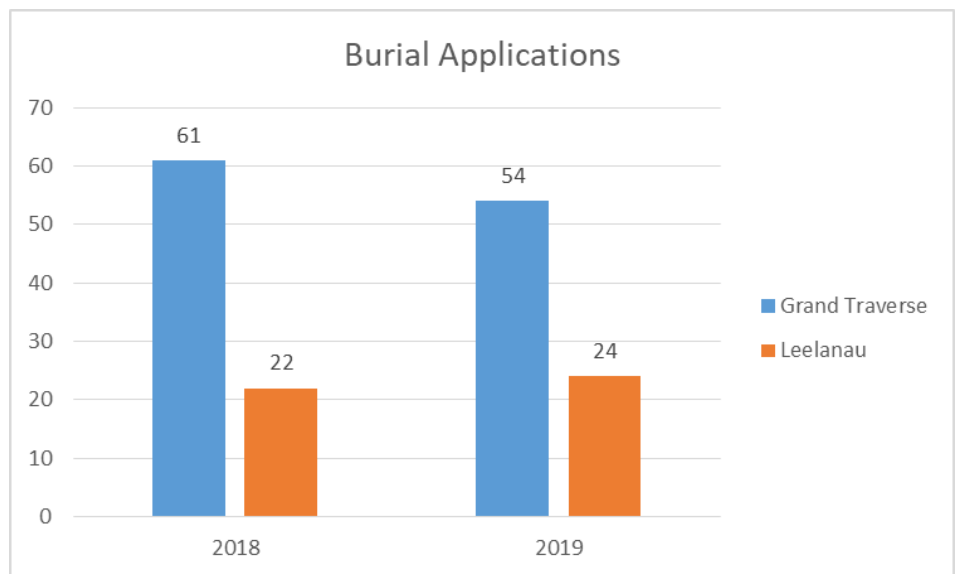
BURIAL & MARKER EXPENSES – FY 2019

Michigan Public Act 235 of 1911 (MCL 35.801-35.804) mandates the payment by the county of \$300 towards the burial of eligible veterans and their spouses and to set government markers. It is the duty of the Veterans Affairs Committee to administer this program.

In FY 2019, we processed 77 applications for burial benefits. Our office approved 54 County Burial Allowance applications for a total expenditure of \$ 18,183.10

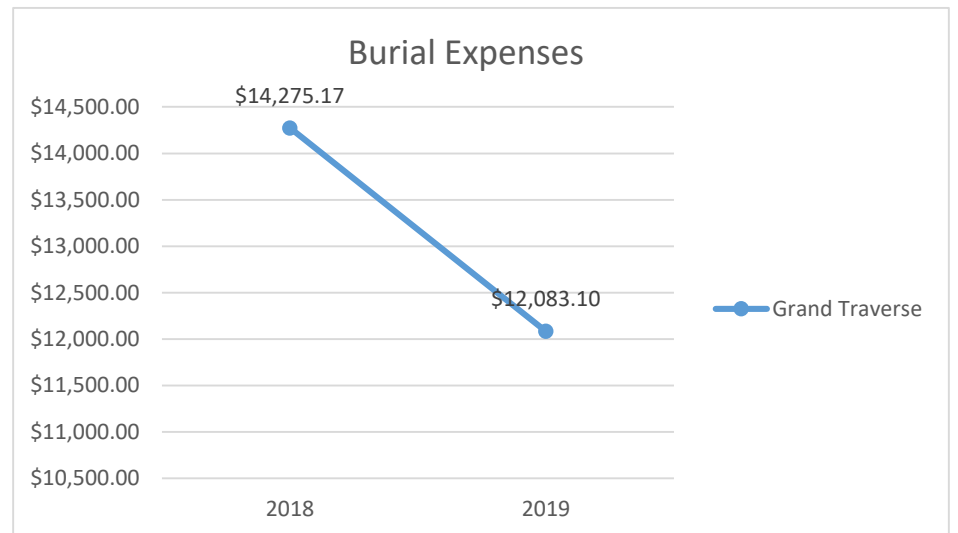
Approved Applications

Grand Traverse	54
Leelanau	24



County Burial Expenditures

Grand Traverse	\$ 12,083.10
Leelanau	\$ 6,900.00



RELIEF EXPENSES – FY 2019

Under Michigan Act 214 of 1899, the county board of commissioners of each county shall annually levy a tax, not exceeding 1/10 of a mill on each dollar, to be levied and collected as provided by law, upon the taxable property of each township and city, for their respective counties, for the *purpose of creating a fund for the relief of honorably discharged indigent members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and women's auxiliaries and the indigent spouses, minor children, and parents of each indigent or deceased member who served during a period of war as described in 38 CFR 3.2.*

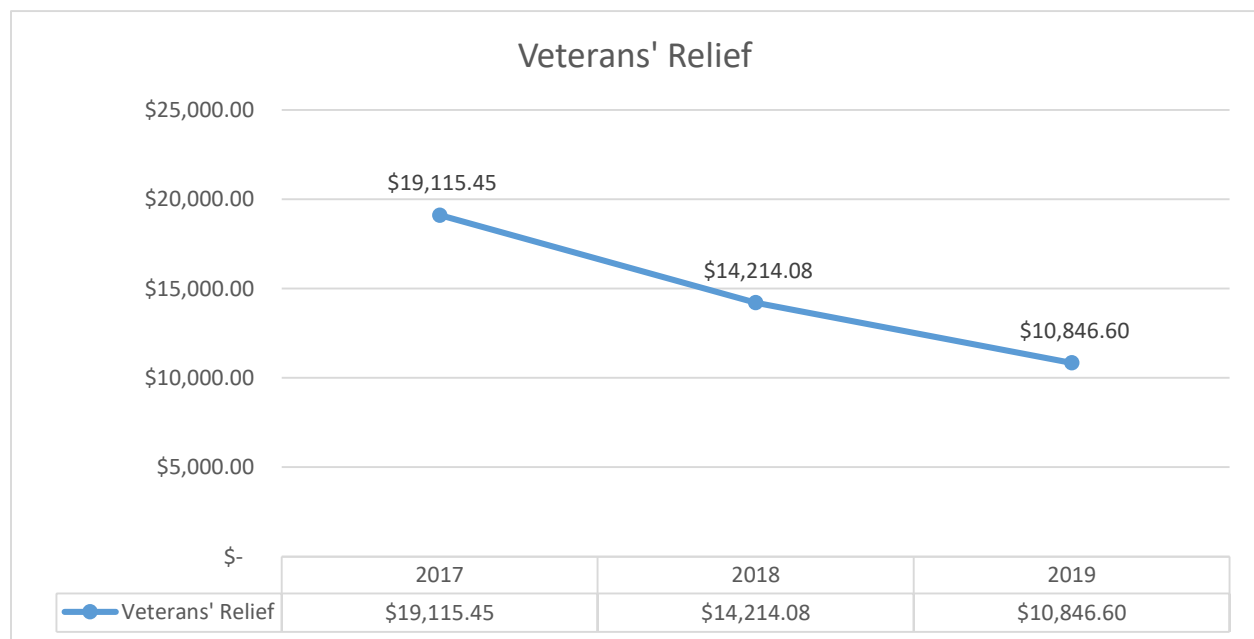
While the emergency relief budget for FY 2019 was \$25,000, only \$10,846.60 was spent.

Emergency Relief Applications

22 Approved

Annual Relief Expenditures

\$10,846.60



In previous years expenditures were slightly higher due to first utilizing the Veterans Relief ahead of MVTF. The office policy has now changed to try to provide financial assistance through the MVTF first before expending local GTC VA funds. This will continue to saving money within our line items locally.

GRANTS / AWARDS

GT Band 2% Grant

The Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians provides a semi-annual grant where county and non-profit organizations can apply for financial awards to assist their organizations.

The GTCVA was awarded \$10,000 to expand outreach and provide Peacetime veterans with financial assistance.

- Durango vehicle wrap
- Tent with back wall
- Table cloth
- Stand up banners
- Two complete bus wraps
- Peacetime veterans' assistance



MICHIGAN VETERANS TRUST FUND



In 1946, the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund was created from \$50 million in post-World War II reserve funds. From utility bills to home repairs to medical costs, the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF) offers combat-era veterans and their families a way to overcome unexpected expenses and get back on their feet financially.

The Grand Traverse County Department of Veterans Affairs has four Trust Fund Agents that assist veterans in applying for this financial assistance program. *The MVTF provides another avenue of financial assistance to veterans and their families at NO COST to Grand Traverse County taxpayers.*

Applications for assistance are reviewed and decided upon by committee appointed by the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund Board of Trustees. Appeals and reviews are sent to the board for consideration at their monthly meeting.

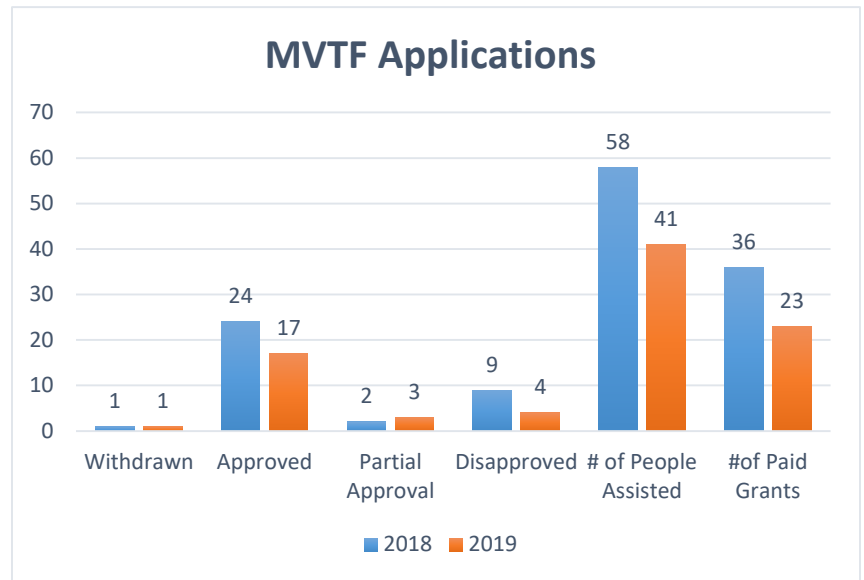
2019 MVTF County Committee Members

John Lefler
Jim Wegener
Brad Finkbeiner
John Kuhlman

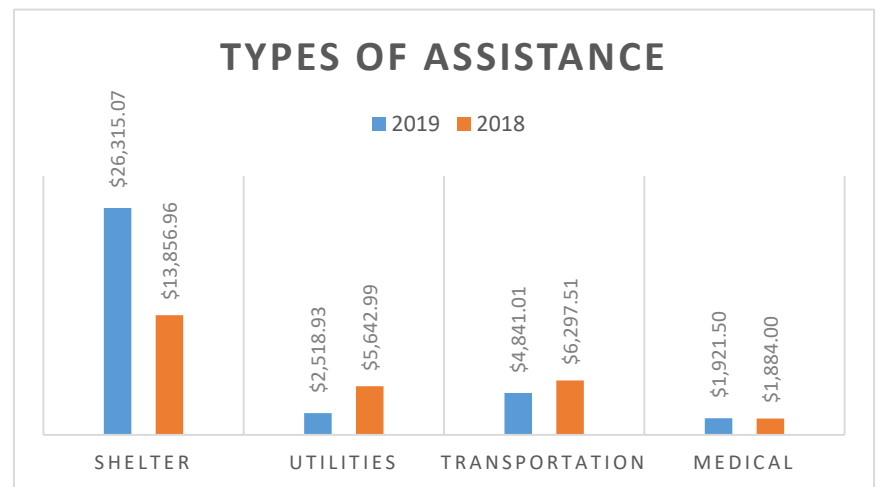
FY 2019 MVTf DETAILS

Grand Traverse County

Withdrawn	1
Approved	17
Partial Approval	3
Disapproved	4
# of People Assisted	41
# of Paid Grants	23
Total # of Apps	28

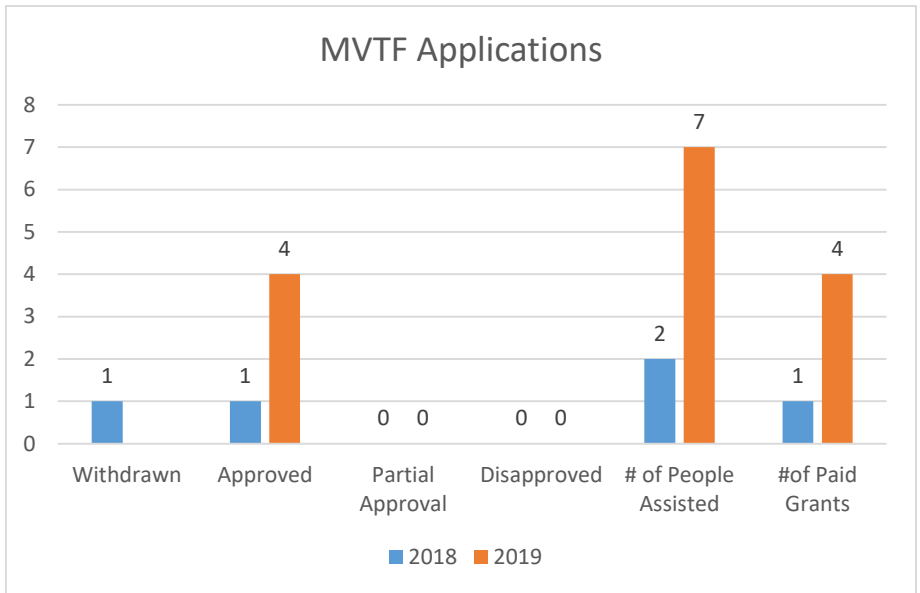


Shelter	\$ 26,315
Utilities	\$ 2,519
Transportation	\$ 4,841
Medical	\$ 1,922
Total	\$ 35,597

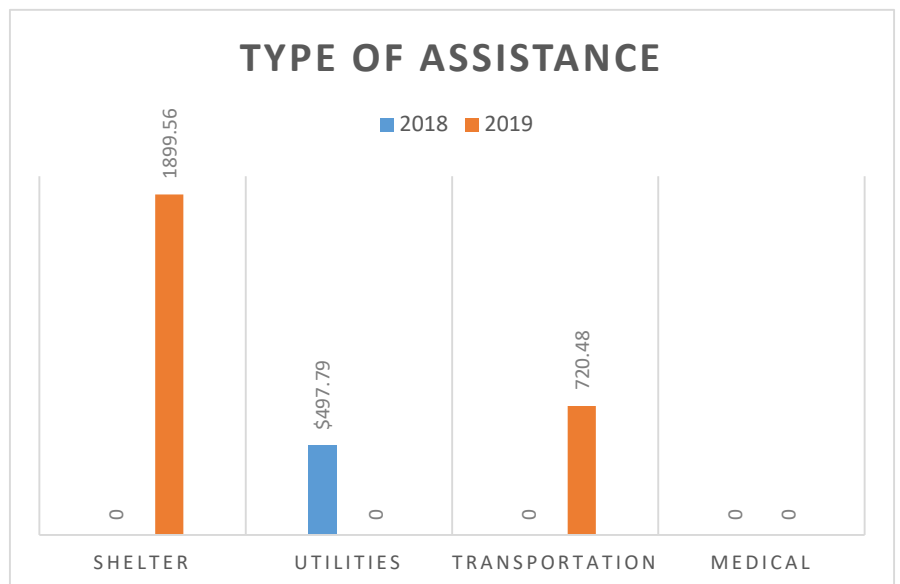


Leelanau County

Withdrawn	0
Approved	4
Partial Approved	0
Disapproved	0
# of People Assisted	7
# of Paid Grants	4
Total # of Apps	4



Shelter	1899.56
Utilities	0
Transportation	720.48
Medical	0

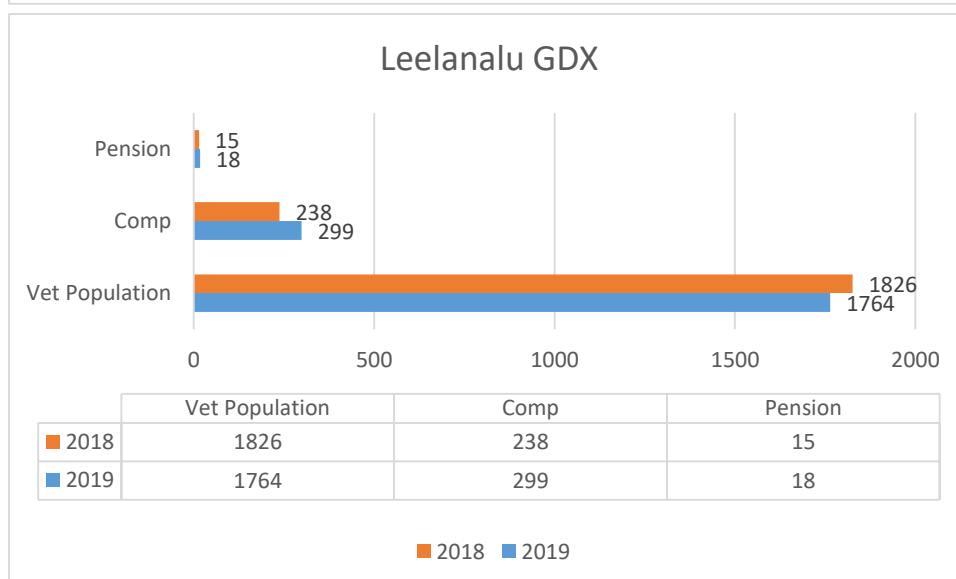
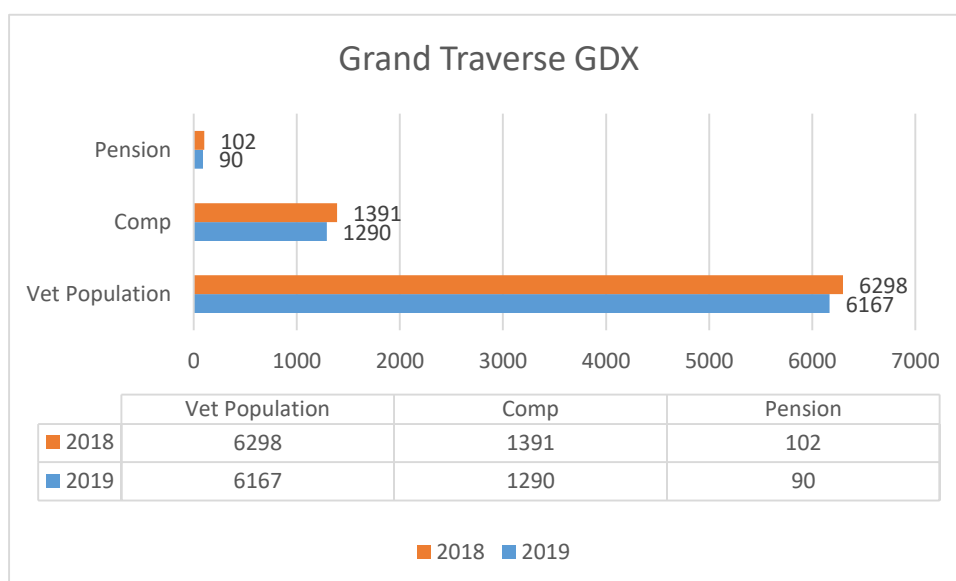


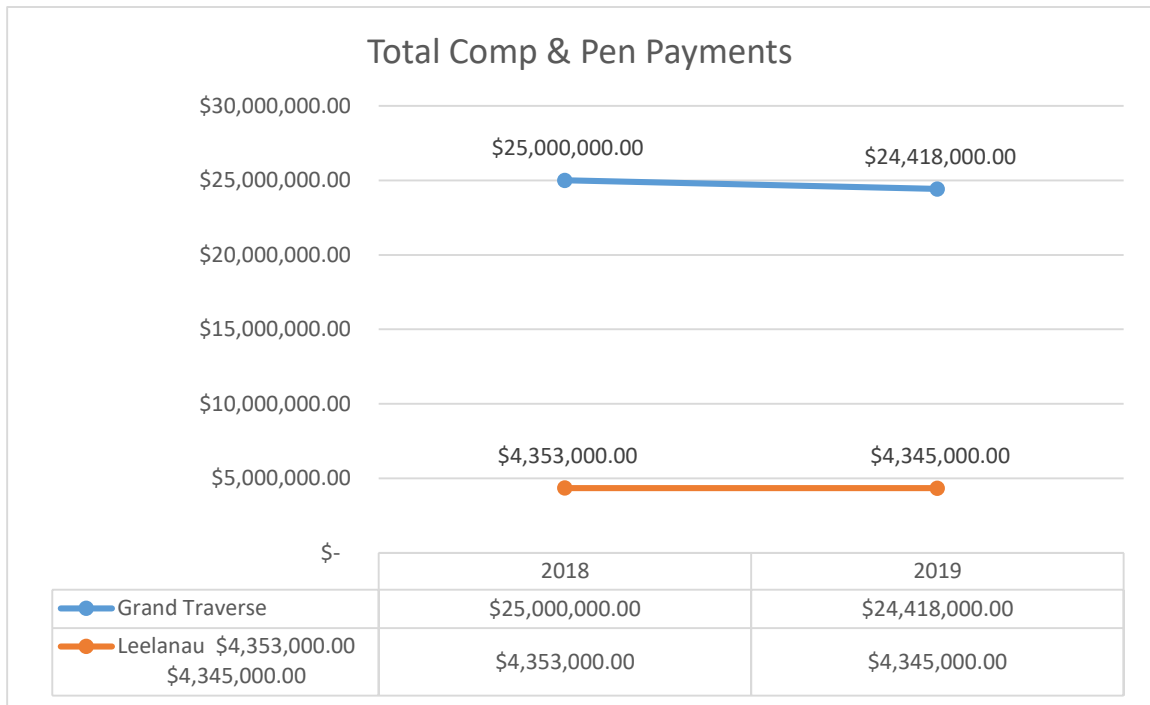
US DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS EXPENDITURES

The chart below summarizes the monetary benefits expended to Grand Traverse, and Leelanau County veterans and their dependents for Federal Benefits. The GDX report is always a year behind due to the amount of data to compile these reports, but this gives our office a baseline to start from for reporting purposes.

While Michigan is in the top 15 for the amount of VA dollars spent for the state, we are 35th when it comes to Compensation & Pension per veteran capita.

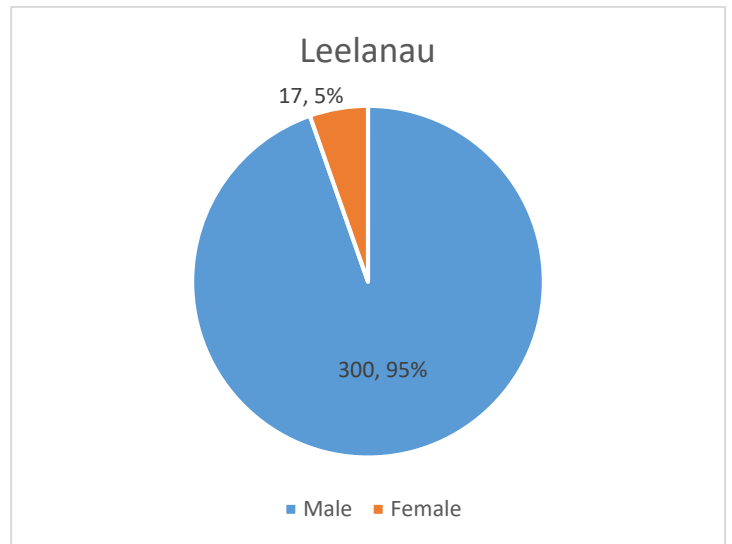
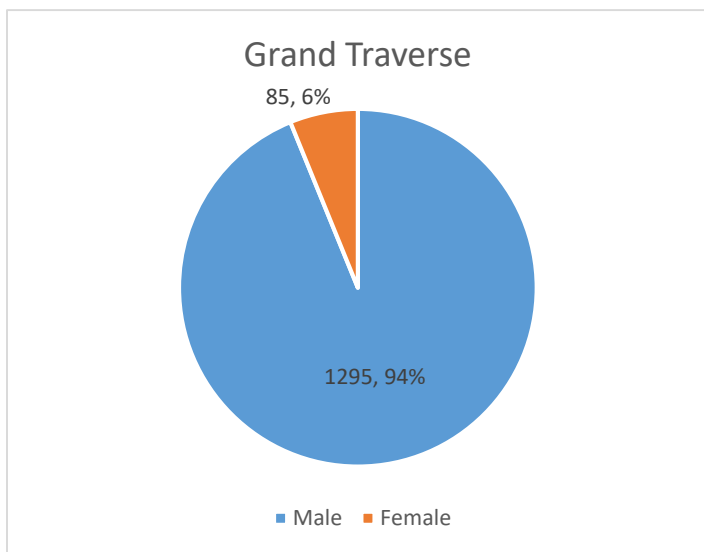
The graphs below help shed light on the veteran demographics for our service areas for the total population of veterans within our county, the number of veterans receiving compensation or pension benefits.





In Grand Traverse County, veterans receiving Compensation or Pension payments has lowered accordingly with the veteran population. While in Leelanau County, there has been an increase in the total amount of payments while their veteran population declined.

This could be attributed to the amount of new outreach being done in the region.



We are now tracking the number of male/female veterans that are receiving VA compensation or pension payments in each county.

2019 SNAPSHOT

Veterans & Spouses Forum

Our office established the Veterans & Spouses Forums. This was due to the fact that many spouses do not know what federal, county or state benefits they are able to receive upon the passing of the veteran. During this forum, staff members presented information on how to prepare for the passing of loved one to include: burial benefits, burial flag, survivor's pension, aid & attendance, etc.

GATHER Veterans Magazine

Our office partnered with GATHER Media LLC to produce a bi-monthly magazine for veterans. This was done at no cost to our office and our office receives 1,000, free of charge. The magazine is paid for through advertising partners, sponsors and subscriptions.

GATHER Veterans is meant to be an educational publication for veterans and their dependents in Northern Michigan.

The first issue was handed out on Veterans Day at the Elks Veterans Dinner and it featured the Veteran of the Year and Veterans Supporter of the Year.



Veteran Services Outreach

Friday Outreach- The first three Fridays of every month a veteran service office rotated locations throughout Grand Traverse and Leelanau County to speak to veterans in each specific area. Kingsley Library – 1st Friday, Interlochen Library -2nd Friday, Leelanau Government Center – 3rd Friday. All locations were staffed from 2pm-4pm.

Reining Liberty Ranch – Every Thursday afternoon a veteran service officer provides services at the ranch from 2pm – 4:30pm related to benefits counseling.

Senior Expos – GTCVA had a table at the 2019 Grand Traverse Senior Expo where over 1,640 seniors attended. With the large senior veteran population in the Grand Traverse region, our office is present at both Grand Traverse and Leelanau Senior Expos.

Community Room

The GTCVA acquired a new office space in the building. This is to expand our community services outreach. Throughout 2019, the Homeless Representative from the Northern Michigan Community Action Agency provided staff for this office twice a week. This helped alleviate sending clients back and forth to gain benefits. We are searching for other partners to share the space.

Veterans Treatment Court

Our office was a part of forming a formal Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) for the 86th District. In September, *Justice for Vets* came to Grand Traverse to train the newly formed court team. Michael Roof is the Volunteer Veteran Mentor Coordinator for the VTC. The mentor coordinator pairs justice-involved veterans with volunteers who act as support systems while going through the program. We are still unsure of a start date as this program is still in the beginning planning stages.

MACVC / MVAA

The Michigan Association of County Veterans Counselors along with the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency attended monthly meetings to create newer opportunities within the veteran community. This was not set up prior to 2019.

New Vehicle Purchase

The purchase of a 2019 Dodge Durango allowed the office to have a “rolling billboard”. The Durango serves as the main mode of transportation for department employees while carrying our tent, table cover, and stand up banners for outreach events.



Veterans only Coupon Program

A new partnership with Grand Traverse County Senior Center Network has helped to provide and pay for various health classes for area senior veterans. These classes are provided at a low cost of \$2 - \$5 per class. A punch card is provided to veterans for \$2 off any class at the Senior Center. This is to help promote active living among veterans who are on a fixed monthly budget. This program was renamed to Wellness for Veterans Program in November 2019.



Veterans Only Coupon Program

Brought to you by a partnership between the Grand Traverse County Veterans Affairs Office and the Senior Center Network.

Beginning Monday, March 11, 2019

Free program coupon books available to area veterans for health and wellness programs within the Senior Center Network. Coupons allow veterans to attend selected FREE activities in Traverse City, Kingsley and Interlochen. Coupon books are limited and available on a first come, first served basis.

Coupon book details:

Books contain twenty coupons.

Coupons expire on December 27, 2019.

Coupons may only be used for the following programs throughout the network: Energetics, Strong Bones, Yoga, Chair Massage, Reflexology. Full program descriptions available on our website and in the People, Parks and Programs newsletter.

How veterans can receive coupons:

Visit the Grand Traverse County Senior Center Network at 801 E. Front Street, Traverse City to pick up a coupon book. Coupon books are limited and are available on a first come, first serve basis.

In order to receive a coupon book, participants must:

Be a current Senior Center Member in Grand Traverse or Leelanau County.

Present proof of veteran status in person to a staff member.

Complete a Grand Traverse County Veterans Affairs registration form.



Grand Traverse County Senior Center Network

801 E. Front Street, Traverse City, MI 49686

231-922-4911, grandtraverse.org/scn

Locations in: Traverse City, Acme, Kingsley, Interlochen, Fife Lake

STRATEGIES FOR 2020

Senior Facilities

Establish VA Benefit presentations for veterans and dependents at senior facilities located in Grand Traverse and Leelanau Counties. This is to help educate their residents on the availability of the Pension benefits to help with medical care. This may also include monthly meetings in locations where a VSO can assist with the claims process, as well.

New Partnerships

Build new and better partnerships with community organizations that work with veterans. By asking these organizations to present at one of our monthly VA Committee meetings, it gives our board and staff insight into where and how a referral could be used in assisting our clients.

Vet Center

Further building relationship with local VA Vet Center to establish weekly office hours at their location to assist veterans in filing claims.

GATHER Veterans Magazine

Increase awareness of Veterans' benefits through growing the GATHER Veterans brand. Seek out community partners that will assist in providing information for articles and continued partnership.

Benefits Discovery

Revamp the Outreach program to more focused areas to maximize impact. With the monies from the MVAA County Veterans Service Grant, create advertising opportunities through various marketing mediums in order to reach more veterans and dependents.

Coast Guard Outreach

Establish a stronger connection with Coast Guard members so they are aware of local and VA Benefits upon discharge. Our office is working on creating a transitional program for when service members are getting ready to process out of Coast Guard.

Peshawbestown Outreach

Our office is looking to provide a better service to Native residents. We are in the process of building a relationship with Peshawbestown officials. We hope to secure a location to assist their residents in filing veterans' benefits for members in their community.

Community Health Outreach

As many veterans use private healthcare, there is not always a connection point to veteran services in the area. Our office will explore relationships with local hospitals and healthcare providers that would refer veterans to our office for assistance.

STAFF

Director

Michael W. Roof

Office Specialist

Michael Redmond

Veteran Service Officers

Lucas Clark

Brandon Corbin

Chris Dailey

2019 VA COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman

Robert “Art” Eisner

Vice-Chairman

Ron Hofmeister

Secretary

John Block

Committee Members

Neal Horning

Mollie Sourek

Racheal Sherman

William Fowle